

Message Text

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ACTION OES-09

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FM AMEMBASSY GABORONE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2939
INFO AMEMBASSY MASERU

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DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS AID

FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: SPOP LT
SUBJ: POPULATION GROWTH AND ADEQUATE FOOD PRODUCTION: REPORT
ON LESOTHO

REF: STATE 201283

1. SUMMARY: REGRET ABSENCE OF REPLY WHICH DOES NOT MEAN
ABSENCE OF DISCUSSION IN LESOTHO OF FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEMS
RAISED REFTEL. INDEED, THE NEED TO INCREASE FOOD PRODUCTION
IS ONE OF LESOTHO GOVERNMENT'S (GOL) HIGHEST PRIORITIES ON
BOTH POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC GROUNDS: POLITICAL BECAUSE IT
WOULD ENABLE GOB TO HELP REDUCE CURRENT OVERWHELMING ECONO-
MIC DEPENDENCE ON SOUTH AFRICA WHICH SURROUNDS IT;
AND ECONOMIC BECAUSE AGRICULTURE IS THE WAY OF LIFE FOR
SOME 85 PERCENT OF THE PEOPLE AND HOLDS OUT WHAT LITTLE
PROMISE THERE IS FOR ECONOMIC ACTIVITY, EMPLOYMENT, ETC.
THUS, MUCH OF OUR DIPLOMATIC DIALOGUE AND MAJORITY OF OUR
AID PROJECTS IN LESOTHO ARE IN ARGICULTURE (FOOD AND NUTRITION).
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FOLLOWING IS REPORT ON THAT DIALOGUE AND OUR EFFORTS TO HEIGHTEN
CONSCIOUSNESS ABOUT FOOD/POPULATION PROBLEMS. END SUMMARY

2. BACKGROUND. IT CANNOT BE REPEATED TOO OFTEN
THAT LESOTHO IS A POVERTY-STRICKEN, UNDERDEVELOPED
MOUNTAINOUS KINGDOM WITH 85 PERCENT OF ITS 1.2

MILLION PEOPLE LIVING CLOSE TO THE MARGIN OF SUBSISTENCE. (E.G. LESOTHO IS THE HIGHEST PER CAPITA RECIPIENT OF FOOD AID IN THE WORLD) LESOTHO'S PROBLEMS AND PRIORITIES ARE INSEPARABLE FROM THE FACT THAT IT IS SURROUNDED BY, AND OVERWHELMINGLY DEPENDENT ON, THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA (RSA). THIS, ALONG WITH THE GREAT PRIDE AND DIGNITY OF THE PEOPLE, ACCOUNTS FOR THE FACT THAT THE ONLY HIGHER PRIORITY THAN FOOD PRODUCTION HAS BEEN THE SOUTHERN PERIMETER ROAD WHICH ENABLES PEOPLE TO AVOID THE TRANSKEI WHICH IS REGARDED AS NOTHING MORE THAN AN APPENDAGE OF APARTHEID. THE DECISION OF THE USG (USAID) TO BUILD THE ROAD HAS GIVEN THE GOL A SENSE OF RELIEF AND ENABLES IT TO FOCUS ON QUESTIONS OF POPULATION, NUTRITION AND FOOD PRODUCTION.

3. DIALOGUE. THE EMPHASIS TO DATE ON AGRICULTURE HAS BEEN EVIDENT IN BOTH OUR DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS AND OUR AID PROGRAMS. (THE RELATIVE SOFT-PEDALING OF POPULATION MATTERS REFLECTS THE FACT THAT PRIME MIN JONATHAN AND THE RULING PARTY ARE SUPPORTED BY THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH. DIRECT GOL INVOLVEMENT IN FAMILY PLANNING HAS RAISED QUESTIONS IN PARLIAMENT WHICH, ALTHOUGH NOT WIDELY SUPPORTED, HAVE CONVINCED GOL TO MOVE WITH CAUTION SO AS NOT TO AROUSE RESENTMENT THAT WOULD NEGATE SMALL ADVANCES MADE TO DATE IN FAMILY PLANNING). ANY DISCUSSION IN FOOD PRODUCTION MUST TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE EXTRAORDINARY CONSTRAINTS. THESE CONSTRAINTS CAN BE SUMMARIZED UNDER THE FOLLOWING PRINCIPLE HEADINGS: (A) RELATIVE ABSENCE OF ARABLE LAND
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(ONLY 12 PERCENT IS SUITABLE FOR AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION); (B) THE ABSENCE OF AN AGRICULTURAL WORK FORCE, I.E., SOME 150,000 TO 180,000 MEN, (OR 75 PERCENT OF MEN BETWEEN AGES OF 15-44) WORK IN SOUTH AFRICA; (C) HUMAN AND NATURAL OBSTACLES, WHICH GOL HAS TRIED TO OVERCOME BY NUMEROUS SCHEMES WITH INDIFFERENT RESULTS, E.G. PREMATURE INTRODUCTION OF MECHANIZED AGRICULTURE (TRACTORS), IMPROVISED PLANS FOR "SHARE CROPPING", ETC. IN BRIEF, THE INDIGENOUS DISINCENTIVES TO AGRICULTURE ARE COMPELLING. THIS FACT HAS BEEN ILLUSTRATED IN MY TWO RECENT DISCUSSIONS WITH MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE (MOA) LEROTHOLI (JUNE 15 AND JULY 20) DURING WHICH WE REVIEWED HIS APPROACH TO HIS TASKS. REGRETTABLY, OUR TALK WAS DOMINATED BY THE NECESSITY OF RAISING CATTLE IN SUFFICIENT NUMBERS TO ENSURE OPERATION OF THE NEW ABATTOIR. HIS METHODS ARE TO INTRODUCE "MODERN FEED LOT" SYSTEM. MY QUESTIONING LEFT NO DOUBT ABOUT THE SKEPTICISM REGARDING THIS PROJECT, ESPECIALLY GIVEN PAUCITY OF FOOD, ABSENCE OF ASSURED MARKETS, ETC. THE NEW MINISTER IS A REALISTIC, PROGRESSIVE-MINDED PERSON WITH WHOM IT IS POSSIBLE (AS WELL AS A PLEASURE) TO CONDUCT DIALOGUE AND DISCUSSIONS. THE OPPORTUNITY WILL ARISE IN THE NEAR FUTURE TO REITERATE OUR CONCERN ABOUT INCREASING FOOD PRODUCTION.

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FROM AMBASSADOR

4. AID PROJECTS. MEANWHILE, OUR ASSISTANCE TO LESOTHO HAS BEEN LARGELY IN AGRICULTURE AND SPECIFICALLY IN THE AREA OF STIMULATING FOOD PRODUCTION. LARGE AGRICULTURE SECTOR ANALYSIS, FARMING SYSTEMS RESEARCH PROJECT, AND AND WATER CONSERVATION PROJECT AND PRODUCTION MARKETING CORPORATION ARE EXAMPLES OF PROJECTS UNDER DISCUSSION OR IN PROCESS OF BEING CARRIED OUT WHICH REPRESENT OUR STRONG EFFORTS TO ASSIST IN DEVELOPING THE FOUNDATIONS FOR INCREASED AGRICULTURE PRODUCTION. IN ADDITION, AN OPERATING PROGRAM GRANT (OPG) IN THE AMOUNT OF 375,000 DOLLARS WAS AWARDED TO HELP GOL SET UP A NATIONAL FOOD AND NUTRITION OFFICE (FNCO). LOCAL PERSONNEL ARE BEING TRAINED IN NUTRITION SERVICE TECHNIQUES THAT SHOULD ASSIST GOL IN ESTABLISHING

A FOOD AND NUTRITION POLICY. WE HAVE, IN ADDITION, BEEN PROVIDING APPROPRIATE COMMODITIES AT GOL REQUEST TO ASSIST LESOTHO FAMILY PLANNING ASSOCIATION. AS NOTED ABOVE, THIS IS A MODEST EFFORT IN A FIELD WHERE THE PROGRAM MUST BE GENERATED FROM WITHIN THE COUNTRY. FINALLY, OUR POPULATION OFFICER (AID REGIONAL HEALTH OFFICER) HAS DEVELOPED EXCELLENT WORKING RELATIONSHIPS WITH
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HEALTH OFFICIALS AND WE WILL CONTINUE TO DRAW ON HER EXPERTISE
IN PROMOTING GREATER ATTENTION TO FAMILY PLANNING AND NUTRITION.

5. CONCLUSION. DESPITE EXTRAORDINARY OBSTACLES WHICH TEND
TO DISCOURAGE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION, WE HAVE NO CHOICE BUT
TO CONTINUE AND INTENSIFY DIALOGUE WITH GOL REGARDING INCREASING
FOOD PRODUCTION AND ENCOURAGING, DISCREETLY, CONTINUED EFFORTS
TOWARDS CONTROLLING IOPULATION GROWTH. WE WILL TAKE CARE TO
REPORT ON THESE EFFORTS MORE FULLY THAN IN THE PAST.
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